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The Furrowed Earth

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The Furrowed Earth

By Gertrude Bone

With Woodcuts by
Stephen Bone

BONE, Gertrude H. (née Gold)
"Lady"

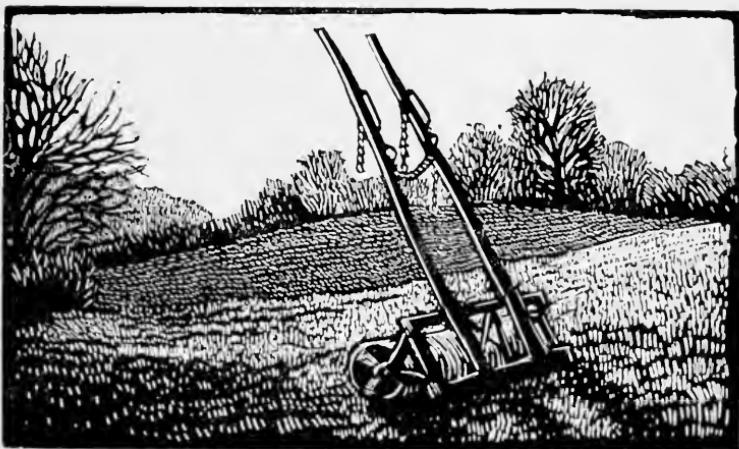
London
Chatto & Windus
1921

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Contents

New Year the Sphinx, 1
Chanticleer, 2
Ploughing, 4
Heat, 5
The Cornfield, 7
Light the Fugitive, 8
Harvest Weather, 10
Largo, 12
Harvest Moon, 14
In the Night, 15
White Fog, 16
Snow in Harvest, 17
Frost, 18
The Secret Folk, 20
Songs at Daybreak, 22
Sunrise, 24
Coming of Spring, 25
The Silver Hazel, 27
A Summer Wind, 28
Of Love I Sang Not, 30
Love, 31
The Mother to the Unborn, 33
Midsummer, 34
Sunlit Fields, 36
October, 37



THE FURROWED EARTH

NEW YEAR THE SPHINX

TENDER my hope as the clear-rising dawn
Whose evening holds a star ;
As sheen on waves that ever is beyond,
Lights my frail glamour still to gleam afar.

Sheathèd my buds of perfume ; still my warmth,
In chaliced stem my wine ;
Unlit my dew ; my winds of life and death
Shake no pale sunlight through my naked vine.

Mute to your questions as my frost and heat,
What backward ways
Hold my tent eyelids ? Forward rise and fall
Ever-renewing, ever-dying days.

Ever there wreathes to fade about my head,
Shadow-bowered memory.
Odorous the hour of roses, in the grass
Sweet airs and music of the days to be.

•

CHANTICLEER

OUT to the clear, chill night,
Chanticleer strains his sight,
At the first stroke of light
Blows he his bugle clear :
“ Je chant clair ! ” calls chanticleer.

Ventures the thrush, then holds,
Lest he be yet too bold,
And day’s first chime untold ;
Brave in the darkness, hear,
“ Je chant clair ! ” of chanticleer.

When other birds take wing,
Chanticleer constant sings,
Steadfast his clarion rings,
Unfailing through the year :
“ Je chant clair ! ” calls chanticleer.

On Christmas night when herds lie warm,
Chanticleer calls alarm
Lest soul unwarned take harm :
“ The morn ! The morn ! Awake and hear !
Je chant clair ! ” sounds chanticleer.

“ ‘Tis midnight ! Where is morn ? ”
“ Nay ! when God’s Son is born
Is not the midnight morn ?
Wake all ye world to hear,
Je chant clair ! ” joys chanticleer.

P L O U G H I N G

WITHIN a windless air so crystalline
That small birds sing as in a happy cage,
And scatter songs as dewdrops everywhere,
A splendid lift of dawn defines the slope
Where one old ploughman, like a spectre, dark
Against the sky behind him, paces out,
The measure of the grave of autumn's gift.
With the slow certitude of cramped old age,
His head down-bent, he paces seven rod ;
Then swerves the plough, the heavy harness clanks
And the stiff horses climb up to the sun.
Slow as a rite the slanted furrow turns,
Till stable earth lies driven in ridged waves
Scarred and tormented as the sea in wind.
Within the hollow of the field he seems
A lean old peasant settling to his work,
Taking his wind and weather like the rooks ;
But on the field's bright ridge a monument,
A gesture of earth's labour. Such a man
Scanned the lone dawn at Haran and from opulent dearth
Cast the ripe seed to immemorial death,
Priest of the sacrifice as old as man.

H E A T

THE blue has left the sky and on the ground
Colour has fallen prone ; in sapphire haze
Hills that were near now swim like dreams afar.

All little flocks of cloud wing to the sea ; the sky,
Emptied of variation now remains
A white dome for the splendour of the sun.

His power he uses like a conqueror, pours on earth
His heat insistent, till the laden air
Shudders with its white burden and gay fields are grave.

Trees crouch beneath the weight and cover close
The cool deep fount of darkness at their heart,
Lest the sun drink of it and leave it parched.

Silence stands in the noontime ; in the fields
No intermittence of the sun's bright spears
Gives ease of breathing ; shadow keepeth close.

No winds arise to break the sanctities
Of fertile heat, but prostrate on the sea
Lie waiting Autumn's shout for winnowers.

The earth draws nigh to labour, and all life
Toils that her fruit may fail not, nor the storm
Frustate her yielding ; sweats the labourer.

Seed cast to warmth in winter strives to warmth ;
The earth rends groaning, the bright fruitage stands,
And the new year begins at harvest-time again.



THE CORNFIELD

THE woods here make a circle, and the hills
Open a hollow in whose sunny heat
Glimmers a ripening cornfield ; see how dark
The covering rampart of the standing wood
To that lone splendour, quiet as a pool
Fed by still dews or by light wandering rains
That in surprise drop soft. All summer here
The sun has stored his treasure, pouring wealth
The lengthened day within this hidden place.
Now like gold sunk in dreams that cannot fade,
Orient it waits the harvest and so stills the eye,
It seemeth Beauty's self that never drew
A tear that she was fair, nor raised a sigh
That she must pass, but ever-deepening joy
That she could be, content full-brimmed and still.
Now the sun passes and the field seems an eye
Which has so long been rapt with one fair sight
That it becomes the thing it gazes at.
The steady shadow draws the circle true,
The wood stands waiting, still as any cloud
That has no wind to tell it where to go ;
And as light fades above, the deep-sunk field
Glows in the wood's heart like a very sun.

LIGHT THE FUGITIVE

LIGHT which was everywhere had gone
The whole long day ;
Only the settled twilight of the storm
Shows still the way
To do day's work ere yet the night come on.

Now the wind rests him pondering where to turn
His variant strength ;
And on the instant slips a ray of light
The cloud's full length,
Clings to its edge and steady there doth burn.

The cloud just stirs with thunder and the light
Has instant fled.
Fallen on the ground, among the iris-blades
She flashes red,
And, a bright snake pursued, slips out of sight.

Cautious her bright eyes peer, flashing she runs ;
The ivy wet
With ceaseless rain is, as she goes,
A lighted rivulet,
And of the laurel leaves she maketh suns.

The storm has found her ! The poor mimic sun
Enrayed in leaves
Is in eclipse ! Draws she a scimitar,
And warrior's greaves
Buckles on the old oak as she doth run.

As the clouds circle in pursuit of her,
Changeling her form ;
Streams, glittering leaves and glimmering weathercock,
Wake of the storm,
Wings of her dragon-fly are everywhere.

Storm-clouds tread down the hill in companies,
On the dead sea
The horizon gleams and light's swift hosts advance ;
But farther see
Breaking against the slope she shattered is.

Now for her courage her great general
In the high sky
Lays bare his hero's sword within the heaven,
And thrusts thereby
A severance in the cloud, grave interval.

Turned to regard him all the clouds re-meet ;
Swiftly the light
Floods like a wave the hill, and rising thence
A conqueror bright
Throws her full largesse o'er their fast retreat !

HARVEST WEATHER

WHEN summer went and when the autumn came
One scarcely knew ; yet now the autumn stands
Chin-deep in mist within the morning fields
Fierce to achieve his harvest, counted gold.
The sun has left his distance and draws near,
And seems to guide his rays, so straight they seek
The unshadowed corn which has dark earth forgot,
And stands in pride of its bright multitude.
In his own light as in a dwelling, he
Lives in the fields as if he is aware
Of short duration and has now no time
To mount the height of heaven. Within the wood
The overflowing gold trickles and runs
And lies there motionless until the ebb
Of sunset draws it back ;—blue shadows wait.
In light as in the water, see one shrivelled leaf
Float, turn and sink, and then lie drowned in wealth
Of the sun’s spilled splendour. The morning light
Is sober as an evening near its close.
On the far hills where sunshine walks alone
The air is all alive with troubled gold
That knows not where to fall, until the sun,
Drawing his tender radiance from the earth

With his dun shadow following close behind,
Sinks down at leisure ;—so they rank,
And lines of cloud mourn day's mortality
In flush of purple. Nearer stands each day
The harvest. Through the impassable fields of grain
Scythes sing their measure, “ Better reap than sow !
Seed sown's like tears of one who weeps alone,
Full grain is joy in chorus ! Beat, then, beat !
And let the corn lie folded like shed waves
For ever still from storm.” The full-flushed harvester
Turns open eyes upon the brimming sun,
And, satisfied he reaps. The cleanly corn
He sets in hooded sheaves till evening-time,
And the fields kneel for pride all penitent.

L A R G O

IN the sky's leisure strong old winds do lift
Salt storms from secret places of the sea,
Menacing energy !
From the forerunning shadow speeds the light outcast.

All things are changed upon the crouching earth :
The travelling sky throws ever shadow down,
As dark seed sown
On passive harvest-ground that has no choice.

Now to new-budded flowers new fledglings come,
Sharp rains and strong to smite them in their faith,
That heaven is blithe,
And air steeped in the sun lies ever still.

On the horizon's edge naught moves but storm,
That opens as it goes a passage-way,
Hills that must stay
Stand suddenly like watch-towers, dark and imminent.

How turbulent the trouble of the sky,
Turned sudden to the land an enemy.

What spuming sea
Sent forth those bitter arrowflights of rain ?





Lo, from his wrath set free a cornfield shines !
A wood shakes off the shadow, a bird sings,
 All cowering things
Feel sudden ease,—the sea draws back his breath.

Heaves the blue sky his shoulder, and the storm
Slips like a garment which loosed ties unbind,
 High soars the wind,
And the wide sun strides to his place again.

HARVEST MOON

AS halcyon winds in summer scarcely stir
On the resisting cheek, and seem to be,
Not winds so much as wandering fragrances,
And breaths of lovely essence, or to sway
No heavier burden than the scents of flowers,
So softly goes the moonlight through the mist.
As daylight sinking in some caverned sea
Dimmed by no blur of ripple from without,
The luminous quiet sinks, until the haze,
Precious and weighted, thrills almost to speech,
Then lets her treasure flow. Not rivulets but seas
Of silver flood submerge the harvest field.
Deep upon deep they settle and are still,
Until th' unstirred enchantment holds the corn
Motionless in its wonder. So the earth
Hushed from awaking, see the living moon
Possess herself of heaven and in its blue
Steadfast and deep remain. The slumbering clouds,
The infinite domed distance of the stars,
With its imagined and far-lighted ways,
Lie with earth's haze and silent dark-hued corn
In a vast shining quiet.

IN THE NIGHT

If I saw a child's face raised to the element,
 Searching the moon ;
Scanning her seas of tranquillity, rainbows and reverie,
I should say, " Speed thou in radiance
Mounting heaven's stairs apart, shining indifferent ;
 Lo ! Earth's babe thinketh ! "

If I saw a boy's face dead on the battlefield
Turned to the moon,
I should say, " Veil thee, O Planet !
Cloud thee thy seas of tranquillity, rainbows and reverie !
Looking to life he sees death, yet hails him undaunted ;
 Lo ! the boy chooseth ! "

If I saw crosses raised above faces
Hid from the moon ;
I should say, " Shine thou, bright in sterility ;
Roll with thy seas of tranquillity, rainbows and reverie !
Smitten by a death, earth yet holdeth a gratitude ;
 Lo ! the world hopeth ! "

WHITE FOG

THE fields are blind and soundless in a mist ;
Only far water falling
Calls and is ever calling.
The voice of the blind fields
Endless, monotonous, dull.
Like one who sees no distance and no variation,
Who plaineth ever calling,
As that far water falling,
Ceaseless, unvaried and aloof in mist.

S N O W I N H A R V E S T

A UTUMN, nigh to go,
Holds a shining sphere,
Wherein pictured Winter
Showeth near.

Sunlit fields are cold
With celestial snow,
And fair arks of gossamer
Every hedgerow.

Deep the hoary dew
Blanched the gossamer,
Though the limpid sphere
Lights the sunnier.

Snow of harvest heat,
Like a gift of price,
In a jewelled cup
Beads of ice.

Early morn and eve
Autumn lights a sphere,
Wherein shineth winter
Drawing near.

F R O S T

A LILAC glow at night, a breath, a snare,
And lo the wood is taken by a frost !
No late May-frost all hushed and silver glee,
To steal across the grass with delicate feet
And take the tingling cowslip by surprise,
But discipline that makes the woods to moan
And shudder and be silent ; with a wind
To scourge from frolic even the gayest tree
That in the warm, voice-haunted summer-time,
With sun-shot greenery made a swaying tune
To the birds' daylong singing. Since the autumn cast
A fire-enchanted belt at the field's very edge,
The flitting presence which the sunlight sought
Through noiseless summer paths and never found,
He seeks no more, but at the rhythmic edge
That sighed all day, " Ah me, did one but know,
How slow his foot to venture ! " stands without,
While the wood arms itself in coat of mail
With lacing points of silver. Should one come
On southern winds to look upon the wood,
From treeless islands manacled with ice,
He'd swear 'twas made of metal with no life ;
Or a great instrument such as the wind
Will forge for his own music where alone



He labours patient with slow centuries
Making a space about his solitude :
There, where he sings and leans to hear the sound
Flute mellower music as he carves the rocks
To the one perfect shape of his desire ;—
So through the trees,
That shine obedient shafts of ringing bronze,
He threads a melody in monotone,
Warning the ground of winter nigh at hand.
The moon, her summer come, breaks free and swift,
And drops her hindering clouds and shines so bright
'Twould seem as if she left her hueless rays
Upon the fields when morning shows the frost.
Star-haunted water's dead ; and where the rill
Made mimic waterfalls, the children stoop
To bite the icicles which hold it still,
Or laugh to hear shrewd robin wind his watch,
Close by their grasp, to tell the time of year.
Shadows died too, so full of fright were they
When the wind moaned out sudden that the sun
Was coming to an end, and all the birds,
Save those which of the wind do make their song,
Are mute as when the sudden, silent hawk
Blots all the sky with death.
Outlandish owls that do outcry the wind,
The magpie and the lapwing full of grief,
The sobbing pigeon and the peevish jay
Call out of fears, and dark, and chattering cold,
While every gay and sun-divining sound
Sleeps with the voice of summer's nightingale.

T H E S E C R E T F O L K

SOMEONE has left the wood
Just as I came ;
The ouzel knew, sounding a sudden flute
But never a name.

The sunlight knew, but fled with soft feet
Just on before.
The boughs kept silence, pondering and looking at me,
And evermore,

The shadow was still and said nothing
Of any footfall,
Should I turn and go from the glade now
Would a low voice call

With the thrush, “ Is she gone ” ? Would the weazel peer
To see if I guessed ?
Would the spider muffle the postern in silk
For the dreamless rest

Of the listener pausing long in the wood
Lest my foot return ?
Dwells shadow alone in the green-bowered dusk ?
I shall never learn.

Coney and velvet mole
On soft-dewed moschateL
Be it waiting phantom or empty green silence,
No one will tell !

SONGS AT DAYBREAK

THE night has ebbed a little space,
The day is yet afar,
Deep in the rondure of the heaven
Trembles one shrinking star.

In that dim hour, when sleep yet holds
All things in secrecy,
The birds awake and music make
To the still skies and me.

Like bells that call in airy heights,
Vibrant the voices go,
There is no earth, heaven is unseen,
Midway they poise and flow.

Invisible the singers sit,
Bright people of the air,
Rills of quick joy beseeching go,
Entreating answers fair.

Love in their throats makes such sweet sounds,
Hark the triumphant thrush !
As he would gain that screenèd joy
With one melodious rush.

Like fairest thoughts that hold aloof,
Like a bright rainbow torn,
Gaily they float unprisoned yet
These song-birds yet unborn.

S U N R I S E

TREMBLES the dawn with music, on the air
Thrills the high note that speaks the blackbird's love ;
The sky is all with songs entangled,
Cautious the day through singing sweet doth move.

As the whole world rose to his merry flute,
Labours the thrush to poise the sun secure,
And lest bare branches fright his love away,
Dresses the boughs with singing for her warm allure.

At ease the sun doth his bright radiance make,
What need of haste when all things else lie still !
Fields keep their shade ; the wood a phantom is ;
And as his shadow's self that rounded hill.

Slow now the sky that was with lyric winds
And trembling filaments of lovely sound
Enmeshed and threaded, moves a pace apart,
And straight the ringing tangle's on the ground.

No hurrying song can hold the unhindered sky,
Free, with immortal gesture slow begun,
Loosed from earth's sleeping side there surges forth,
Boundless, in swift magnificence, the sun !



COMING OF SPRING

I HAD forgotten how

The willow burst all yellow in one night,
And held a tremulous torch to blinded spring,
That so alight,
Through melting snow,
Green wheat and bowing grass might see to grow,
And woodlands waken to the flickering
Of buds that push and sprout on every bough.

Even so I did forget

How western winds blew slanting, silver showers,
That flashed and sank upon the cowslip field,
And told the flowers
Of the gold sun,
So that amazed they opened one by one,
And finding but themselves in his bright shield,
Like him did close their eyes when he did set.

Forgotten meads that gleam

Lit by flood-water, while the robin sings
His little gusty song upon the hedge ;
And whirring wings
Tempt dropping sheaths,
And blackthorn flowers come out before their leaves,
And sunny fields are scented round each edge
With violets running to the banks lest they be seen.

Swift, all I knew
And had forgot of Spring and melody
Shakes winter's hoar amazed quietude.
Fire-toned hilarity,
Sudden and clear,
Leaping to thaw the frost of all the year,
Quicken the cold—the secret multitude
Thrill!—to grey skies the thrush acclaims the blue!

THE SILVER HAZEL

IN the silver hazel a green bird is singing ;
Gold-blown catkins, censers unswung.
Pendulous lamps by the warbling gush unstirred,
Hang full of incense ; throat and silver tongue
Worship gold lamps among ;
And the quick, far-thrown joy of living sound
O'ershoots the silver hazel and goes winging
To the blue sky, uncertain if spring came
Or if the winter did awhile remain.

Green bird, silver hazel, gold lamps and singing,
In an intense and ever-deepening blue,
Paint me a shrine of spring on air unfading ;
Dim-lit winter stained that brilliant hue,
Coloured his jewel-work all true,
Slow lapidary—spring his room invading,
Lit his rare gems and set his crystals ringing.
No winter e'er did make that live bird sing,
Naught loosed that rill of music save the spring.

A SUMMER WIND

CHORIC I surge, upbearing sounds of others' music ;
Tuneless I am till deep desire awake me,
A soundless organ-pipe staying the singing
Of each musician.

Silent is winter's peevish, chiding trumpet !
Call of full floods and clang of tyrannous sea ;
Pæan long sounded ! Soft now comes entreaty
Like rising fragrance.

No ring of Autumn with his stiff, gold armour !
Sun-tinctured summer all alight with flowers ;
Light shaking and the delicate-wingèd glancing
Of humming flies.

Soft-roofèd woods that cover up a shadow,
Screening it close lest any sunlight see !
Where all day long the poplar tells the ring-dove
Of cooling water.

Full-hearted laugh, wide sunlight in the pasture,
And the thin wail of scythes and twittering grass,
And a gay song, all unaware its music
Plaineth some drowned one.



Generous bright water, rushing in a rapture,
Gone as ye fall, your covering rainbow hides
The issuing river of your headlong giving
Singing far distant.

Tender I stoop upon the fecund summer,
Guiding her tendrils, light to stir the pollen,
While she, all-glowing, sighs her happy burden
Of dear fruition.

All full desire I sound, love-throated singing
Of birds in happy coverts, all full-flowering,
All lovely forms I fill and make them vocal,
I, all the spirit !

O F L O V E I S A N G N O T

O F love I sang not, for to me appears
That love in loving lives, in utterance dies ;
Though shed perfume
Makes sweet a room,
How if, its odour spent, love's blossom flies,
And naught be left but tears ?

Lo ! falling petals make in summer-time
Of dawn a fragrance and of night a balm,
Of trancèd air
A box of spikenard rare ;
Come, light ye down sweet words, drop love's stilled essence calm,
And make his heart the vial for my rhyme.

L O V E

BROAD and still is the night in the wood, but in the tree-tops
Where the wind goes and the birds, day lingers longer;
Night begins on the ground, stealing on in the shadows,
Loiters there in the morning, crouching beside the hedgerow.

Grave is the daytime with sombre heated labour !
Jocund is the night, with shining silver spaces,
Ample are the winds that wander in the darkness,
Cool are the moonbeams that fall instead of shadows.

Quiet are all noises but the sounds of night-time,
Shakings in the leaves which startle hidden lovers,
Fondness of the birds with gentle, twittering noises,
And one long call in the wood—the owl awaking.

I will go deep into the dark and listen,
There where the silence welleth ever fuller,
Where in his dim glade, sentinelled by shadows,
Sleep never stirreth—rapt and deep his breathing.

“ Warm bird alighting, urgent in your flying,
Why choose my lips to nest you in the night-time ? ”
“ Empty is the night,” he said, “ a void between two daytimes,
Fold you in this kiss,” he said, “ the secret of the darkness.”

Night heareth not and sleep never stirreth,
Sunk is his glade and dreaming are the shadows ;
“ Old is the night,” he said, “ and cometh back to-morrow ;
Let the grey bat drowse,” he said, “ but we two will waken.”

Still stays the house that waiteth on the hillside,
Hour after hour, content and undisturbed,
Creeping, the snail trails him a silver passage,
And like a peeping child, the moon walks round the window.



THE MOTHER TO THE UNBORN

I WOULD be the wind
Circling the hazel-tree ;
Tender with odours as with singing fair
Wide wings of sunlit air,
Folding the hazel as I would fold thee—
As I would thee.

Sunrise I'd be
Deep in one flower,
Shedding the coloured beauty of its skies ;
And where gold evening lies
Sunset of covering loveliness I'd be,
Bright-rayed for thee.

Forlorn the wind
Forsakes the hazel-tree,
And the slow sunbeams go, ray after ray.
Undreaming rest ! Though wind, though sun should stray,
Mother I am and shall be unto thee,
Mother to thee.

M I D S U M M E R

IN a blue depth the sun has stood all day
Orient and full.

So fine the air, the windows of the woods
Let through the light and bird-songs, both afire ;
Some one far off is singing, the faint sound
Hovers awhile, then fades and is in silence drowned.

Like full content that needs to speak no word,
Quiet profound,

Goes with the sunshine to the steadfast hills,
And seats him there for ever, deep at rest ;
See where the heavy heat upon the field
Glowes like a harvest with its shimmering yield.

Had this day e'er a dawn that has no end,
Poisèd at noon ?

Or sprang it full-born in its golden joy,
Royally glowing, summer perpetual ?
A blazoned scroll the moorland lies unrolled
Pomp to its margin, purple, gules and gold.

A sober cover to a page illumined,
Foldeth the night ;
Claspeth the day for ever with the dark,
Layeth it in the past with quiet hands ;
A gay rhyme told in its entirety,
Old now as the desert or the wandering sea.

S U N L I T F I E L D S

WHAT light lies on the fields
That has so still a shade ;
What sun at flood
So large a quiet made ?

Sank the lit fields to rest,
Tranced by some vision bright
Of lands that never lose
The enchantment of the light !

Where hours that flow as waves
Fall to a golden peace,
Noiseless as air
When sounds of waters cease !



O C T O B E R

A STATIONARY radiance fills the fields
That blinds one to the sky ; the glowing trees
Shine like ripe corn ; the harvest-math
Is all one emerald beauty bright in windless ease.

Still as a meditation is the air,
With shining heart of rapture and one clear
Thrilling of joy within the distant gold,
Where a late blackbird sounds his dulcimer.

Through the gold-dropping boughs the waning sun
Goes with his lure and sets the birds on fire
To follow him beyond the utmost hill,
O'er dim seas vibrant with far-winged desire.

The leaves light down like birds, and the birds' hastened notes
Are shed as leaves, or as the flying rain,
That in June silence shakes the boughs apart,
And runs with sound of wheels in leafy lane.

Now the sun shines but seldom, like a joy escaped,
One lonely ray from his fast-scattering sheaves,
Searching among the fields one day, lays bare
Stainèd October buried in his leaves.

Singing and gold have gone ; the ringing brook,
Floods silent, choked with summer's outcast throng ;
But in the tree-tops hear the bare old boughs
Yearn like a harp on their remembered song.

FOR permission to reprint several of
the poems included in this volume, the
Author thanks the Editors of *The English
Review*, *The Nation*, and *Land and Water*.

PRINTED BY
MORRISON AND GIBB LTD.
EDINBURGH

THE FURROWED EARTH



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